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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 000284

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL KPKO ASEC IV

SUBJECT: REBEL LEADER GUILLAUME SORO RETURNS TO ABIDJAN

REF: A. ABIDJAN 180

1B. ABIDJAN 228

Classified By: Poloff Phaedra Gwyn for reasons 1.4 b&d

11. (U) New Forces (FN) leader Guillaume Soro arrived in Abidjan from the northern rebel capital of Bouake on March 14 around 1100, via UN helicopter. He met with President Gbagbo around noon, immediately after arriving, and then met with Prime Minister Charles Banny. In the evening he met with former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara and former President Henri Konan Bedie, leaders of the two largest opposition parties.

12. (SBU) Soro is ranked number two in the current government as Minister of State, Minister of Reconstruction and Reintegration. He was also a minister in the previous government -- the Minister of Communications. He has been refusing to come to Abidjan, citing concerns about his personal security, since November 2004, when the Ivorian armed forces bombed Bouake and pro-Gbagbo militia attacked cabinet ministers from the FN in Abidjan.

12. (C) Indeed, security for FN ministers in Abidjan has long been a major sticking point in the peace process. Under the previous government, after November 2004 Soro refused to allow any of the FN ministers to attend cabinet meetings unless hundreds of armed FN forces could come to Abidjan to protect them. President Gbagbo refused, and the FN stayed out of the cabinet. Under the new Banny government, all of the FN ministers except Soro have been attending. In early February Prime Minister Banny traveled to Bouake to meet with Soro and try to persuade him to come back to Abidjan. Later that month Soro did come into the government-held zone as far as Yamoussoukro, two-and-a-half hours drive north of Abidjan, for Banny's seminar on implementing the International Working Group's road map (ref A). He came back to Yamoussoukro again for the February 28 summit of Cote d'Ivoire's four principal political leaders (ref B). Something of a breakthrough was achieved at that meeting, when after an initially tense standoff, the FN and the Armed Forces of Cote d'Ivoire (FANCI) were able to reach agreement on mutually acceptable security arrangements for the summit. This seems to have paved the way for a similar understanding on how security will be handled for cabinet meetings, allowing Soro to return. We understand that he is being guarded by UN and French peacekeeping troops.

13. (C) COMMENT: This is another victory for Prime Minister Banny and moves the peace process forward another step. Our Bouake contacts tell us Soro is unlikely to move to Abidjan, but will only come here occasionally for Cabinet meetings and other business. However, having all three principal

opposition leaders -- Bedie, Ouattara and Soro -- in Abidjan
at the same time even for brief periods is a positive step,
but the situation is still fragile and dangerous. END

COMMENT.

Hooks